

# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## WELCOME HOME CEREMONY SCHEDULED FOR SD GUARD SOLDIERS

A welcome home ceremony for 112 soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Bravo Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion and 147th Forward Support Company is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 26, at 2:30 p.m. at the Lincoln High School gymnasium in Sioux Falls.

The public is encouraged to attend the event as the unit returns home from a 10-month deployment to Europe.

While on deployment, the Yankton-based Battery B and Watertown-based FSC provided rocket artillery and logistics support to Operation Atlantic Resolve, which builds readiness, increases interoperability and enhances allied nation partnerships between militaries using multinational training events.

Planned speakers for the ceremony include Gov. Kristi Noem and Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general.

The soldiers returned stateside to Fort Bliss, Texas, Oct. 14, where they have been completing demobilization requirements before returning back to South Dakota.

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# VA AND EANGUS PARTNER TO INCREASE ACCESS TO SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently partnered with the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS) to promote the availability of vital VA-developed education resources for suicide prevention, substance use and abuse, and mental health education to current and former members of the National Guard.

Since Aug. 12, the partnership has explored opportunities for identifying and contacting veterans who are not enrolled in the VA health care system to provide them with information about enrollment.

“VA engaging members of the National Guard is a priority set in the National Strategy for Preventing veteran Suicide,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This partnership enhances the access to these resources for current service members and veterans already connected with the VA.”

“This collaboration will provide access to VA-developed education resources for current and former National Guard members who otherwise do not qualify for VA services, especially when it comes to mental wellness, substance use struggles and necessary emotional support,” said retired U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Frank Yoakum, EANGUS executive director.

The VA will share these resources with the 414,000 EANGUS members in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, as well as the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands. Additionally, it will discuss potential mental health educational initiatives with colleges and universities.”

Go to [VA’s Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention](#) to learn more.

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a veteran in crisis, can contact the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat).



# VA ANNOUNCES NEW PROCESS FOR RESPONDING TO PRIVACY ACT REQUESTS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implemented a new process Oct. 1 for responding to [Privacy Act](#) requests from claimants received by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for access to their claims files.

The VA has amended its process for those requesting their own information while respecting the privacy rights of third-parties by [redacting third-party personally identifiable information \(PII\)](#) from the claims files.

“The VA is committed to providing veterans prompt access to their claim records increasing transparency and improving customer service,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It’s imperative that we protect files containing sensitive and personal information.

The VBA is required by the Privacy Act to allow veterans -- or their representatives -- the opportunity to review or make copies of claims files.

Under this new process, the VA does not anticipate delays in forwarding copies of claims files to veterans or their designated representatives.

## MULDER JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Hannah Mulder has joined the SDDVA team as our new claims examiner.

Mulder is originally from Ellsworth, MN. Mulder started her career working with veterans in the Minnesota Veterans Home in Luverne, MN while earning her degree at the University of South Dakota. She graduated in 2019 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Health Science and minor in Criminal Justice.

Mulder has several family members that have and are currently serving in the military.

Hannah’s email address is [hannah.mulder@va.gov](mailto:hannah.mulder@va.gov).

Please join us in welcoming Hannah to our team.



# VA/DOD TO FUND UP TO \$50 MILLION IN NEW RESEARCH ON TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) launched the Long-Term Impact of Military-related Brain Injury Consortium (LIMBIC) Oct. 1, for which the two organizations pledged to fund up to \$50 million, to research mild traumatic brain injuries (TBI) or concussions.

The five-year effort will receive \$25 million in funding from DOD and up to \$25 million from the VA, depending on availability of funds.

"The VA and DOD share an urgent, ongoing commitment to better understand the long-term impact of TBI," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Through this overarching effort, we are harnessing the best work of our nation's scientists and will lay the groundwork for meaningful progress in diagnosis and treatment."

LIMBIC is composed of researchers and resources from more than 20 organizations, spanning VA, DOD, the National Institutes of Health, universities and nonprofit organizations. The VA and DOD's funding will support a consortium led by a team at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia. The lead investigator, Dr. David X. Cifu, is a senior TBI specialist for VA and a professor at VCU.

The consortium extends the work of a previous collaborative effort known as the [Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium](#), or CENC, also led by Dr. Cifu. The existing CENC cohort, consisting of more than 2 million veterans and service members, started in 2012 and has become the world's largest and best-characterized research cohort dedicated to the study of military TBI. It will expand the cohort; integrate with other government, academic and nonprofit research; and spur new public-private partnerships.

Researchers associated with CENC, and now with LIMBIC, have already documented links between combat concussions and dementia, Parkinson's disease, chronic pain, opioid usage and suicide risk. They have also developed specialized diagnostic tests using questionnaires, physical exams, brain imaging, fluid biomarkers and electrophysiology to probe how the brain recovers from injury.



Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium



# SD BATTALION NAMED MOST OUTSTANDING ARMY GUARD UNIT

The 139th Brigade Support Battalion received the Gen. Walter T. Kerwin, Jr. Award as the most outstanding Army National Guard battalion in the nation presented by the Association of the United States Army, Oct. 14.

The 139th BSB received the award at the AUSA annual conference in Washington, D.C., which recognizes the top performing Army National Guard and Army Reserve units in the country.

The Brookings-based 139th BSB demonstrated excellence in operational planning, execution of training and maintaining high readiness standards above all other Army National Guard units for training year 2018.

During the 2018 training year, the 139th BSB provided mission command and supervision for five units and detachments with about 360 soldiers in five communities throughout South Dakota. They assisted assigned units in meeting training, administrative and logistical requirements to maintain the unit's readiness in support of their state and federal missions.

To be eligible for the award, units must achieve readiness objectives as outlined by U.S. Army Forces Command.

Evaluation criteria for the award include the areas of assigned personnel strength, percentage of personnel qualified in their duty position, attendance at monthly drill weekends and annual training, individual weapons qualification and physical fitness test scores, as well as an effective maintenance program.

Units under the 139th command for the training year included the 139th's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment in Brookings; Company A, 139th BSB in Watertown; Company B, 139th BSB in Mitchell; 235th Military Police Company in Rapid City and its detachment in Sioux Falls; and the 115th Signal Company in Brookings.

"To even be nominated for this award is humbling, but to win it is amazing," Webb said. "These soldiers earned it and deserve it. I couldn't ask for better soldiers and command teams, and it has been an absolute honor to be their battalion commander."

The Kerwin Award was first established in 1976 after the former U.S. Army vice chief of staff who served as the first commander of U.S. Army Forces Command. The command was responsible for ensuring the readiness and training of all Army units in the United States.

Kerwin was a strong advocate of the "One Army" or "Total Army" concept that recognized the important role of the National Guard and Army Reserve. The programs he initiated resulted in a significant improvement in the readiness of reserve components.



# **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR HOMEOWNERS RECOVERING FROM NATURAL DISASTERS**

South Dakota Housing Development Authority (SDHDA) recited that Housing Opportunity Funds (HOF) remain available to aid in recovery efforts for households impacted by the 2019 natural disasters.

Financial assistance available for the disaster support includes cleanup or removal of debris; mold remediation; restoration; purchases of major appliances lost due to disaster (i.e., hot-water heater, furnace, etc.); rent payments; utility security deposits for displaced households; and down payment assistance for the purchase of a housing unit.

Eligible households must have incomes at or less than 80 percent of the HUD area median income in order to apply for an assistance grant of as much as \$5,000. Documentation of losses and expenses, along with any reimbursements received from FEMA, SBA, donations from other sources and insurance proceeds, will be used to determine actual amount of assistance available per household



Families interested in applying for funds may do so by reviewing income qualifications, completing the application form and submitting the application requirements found on the SDHDA website, [www.sdhda.org](http://www.sdhda.org). People who are not able to access the information via the internet may request an application and information by calling Amy Eldridge, Housing Development Officer, at 605.773.3181 or 800.540.4241.

Applications are due by November 15, 2019, at 5 pm (CDT), however, SDHDA will process applications as they are received.

South Dakota Housing Development Authority (SDHDA) was created by the South Dakota legislature in 1973 with a stated mission to provide decent, safe and affordable housing to low- and moderate-income South Dakotans. SDHDA is a self-supporting, nonprofit entity. SDHDA utilizes housing bonds, tax credits and other federal and state resources to fund housing programs that provide mortgage and down payment assistance, housing construction and rehabilitation, homelessness prevention and rental assistance. SDHDA does not discriminate against any person because of race, color, creed, religion, sex, disability, familial status or national origin. For more information, visit [www.sdhda.org](http://www.sdhda.org).

# IT'S GAME DAY



Groundbreaking for the state veterans cemetery was held September 9, and last week was the construction kick-off meeting in Sioux Falls. In a perfect world, all the players would have been dressed in Kansas City Chief jerseys!!!!!!!

During the kick-off meeting, the team played man-to-man defense as they reviewed the playbook and presented their plan of attack. In the huddle with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, were the Office of State Engineering, the National Cemetery Administration, Stockwell Engineers and Journey Construction.

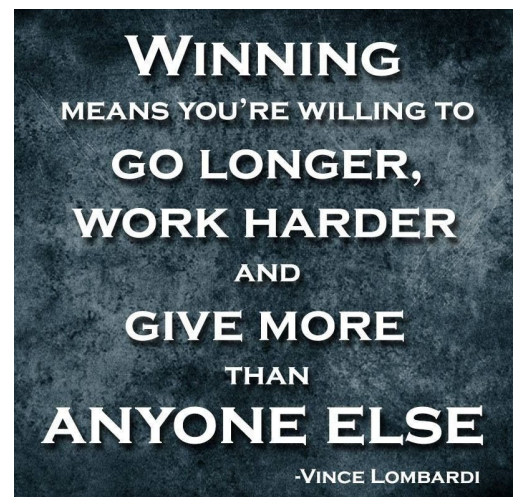
There is no more line of scrimmage for this team. The ball is on the field and they are moving it forward until they have the "Lombardi Trophy" in hand.

To date the Department has received over 70 pre-applications for the cemetery. Information on the cemetery can be found at: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/> and the precertification application form can be found at: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteranscemetery/SDSVC%20Pre-Application%20Form.pdf>.

The South Dakota Veterans Council and their partners are also pushing to the goal line in an effort to raise funds for the SD State Veterans Cemetery Endowment Fund. We continue to promote their activities and playbooks in the newsletter and on Facebook.

In the words of Arnold Glasow, "In life, as in football, you won't go far unless you know where the goalposts are!" Our team and partners all know about the goalposts!

(Above photo courtesy of Stacy Watters Office of State Engineer)





# VFW'S PRESENT DONATION TO CEMETERY ENDOWMENT FUND

Big "SHOUT OUT" to Past State VFW Commander Danny Frisby-Griffin and Past State Auxiliary President Mary Kirkvold for working with their members to secure a donation of \$20,002.40 for the State Veterans Cemetery Endowment Fund!



# GOVERNOR DECLARES NOVEMBER MONTH OF CARING

Governor Kristi Noem has officially proclaimed November as "South Dakota Month of Caring".

The goal is to encourage individuals, businesses, and nonprofits to take part in the rich tradition of caring in South Dakota and to go out and perform good deeds in their respective communities.

November has always been our month to honor our veterans and to be thankful for all we have received because of their sacrifices.

Perhaps this is a great opportunity to reach out to our veterans and make sure they are ok—do a buddy check. Encourage them to visit their local county or tribal veterans service officer. Assist them with challenges they might be facing.

With hundreds of soldiers deployed, November might also be a great time to send a care package or two to the troops. It might be a great time to reach out to the families of the deployed and make sure they have everything they need or assist with small projects.





# VABHHCS UPDATE

The Director of VA Black Hills Health Care System sent a letter to enrolled veterans explaining an upcoming change to Urgent Care hours of operation on the Hot Springs campus. The letter dated October 21, 2019, states: "Effective November 4, 2019, the hours of Urgent Care will become 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Urgent Care will follow the same schedule as Primary Care and will be closed on Federal holidays."

The change in hours is the result of critical staffing shortfalls. Because of the challenge of recruitment and retention of qualified providers, nurses, and ancillary services, such as laboratory and radiology services, the difficult decision was made to reduce hours.

The Urgent Care clinic will continue to provide the highest level of veteran care and maximize the available community resources under the MISSION Act 2018.

Veterans may continue to use all the benefits they are eligible to receive through their Call Center for health-related questions and triage at 1-877-339-6837, MyhealtheVet secure messaging, and same day access in primary care and mental health.

During a medical emergency, veterans should seek immediate medical attention without delay. Veterans and eligible family members should seek the closest available emergency care in life-threatening situations regardless of Urgent Care clinic hours of operation.

The letter explained, veterans do not need to check with the VA before calling for an ambulance or going to an emergency department. A claim for emergency care will never be denied based solely on VA not receiving notification prior to seeking care. A list of network Urgent Care facilities for eligible Veterans can be found at <https://bit.ly/32EXDbv>.

It is important to promptly notify the VA after receiving emergency care at a community emergency department. Notification should be made within 72 hours of admission to a community medical facility. This allows the VA to assist the veteran in coordinating necessary care or transfer, and helps to ensure that the administrative and clinical requirements for the VA to pay for the care are met.

Emergency room notification can be made by calling VA Black Hills Health Care System at 605-745-2000.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

- Nov 2—Second Annual Hangar Dance (Midwest Honor Flight Benefit)—Mid America Museum of Aviation—  
Sioux City, IA—7:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 2—BHSU Hero Appreciation Game— Lyle Hare Stadium—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)
- Nov 5—Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair—Rapid City Rushmore Plaza Civic Center—10:00 am—2:00  
pm (MT)
- Nov 10—Military and Veterans Dinner—Aberdeen First United Methodist Church (502 S. Lincoln Street)—  
12:30 pm (CST)
- Nov 11—State Offices Closed
- Nov 11—Smiles for Freedom—Jackson Dental Clinic—Belle Fourche
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Meal—Custer Jr/Sr High School—10:47 am (MT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Meal—Custer Elementary School—10:50 am (MT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Ceremony—Veterans Memorial Park—11:11 am (MT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Luncheon—Mitchell—Davison County Fairgrounds (3200 W. Havens)—Mitchell—  
Doors open at 10: 30 am, lunch starts at 11:30 and program starts at 12:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Potluck Lunch—VFW #3442 Post Home—12:00 noon (MT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Program—Custer Armory Gym—2:00 pm (MT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Social—Custer Armory Lunch Room—3:00 pm (MT)
- Nov 11—Students' Veterans Lunch—Hermosa School—Noon (MT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Day Program—Hermosa School—2:15 pm (MT)
- Nov 11—Heroes Reception—Hermosa School—3:15 pm (MT)
- Nov 11—Veterans Soup and Chili Feed—#303 Hermosa Post Home—5:00 pm (MT)
- Nov 14—Veterans Day Program—Elk Mountain School—Elk Mountain—2:30 pm (MT)
- Nov 15—ERLS Wills for Heroes—Sioux Falls VA Medical Center—Room D39 (2501 W. 22nd Street)—9:00  
am—4:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 26—Bridge Dedication—Hot Springs—1:30 pm (MT)
- Nov 28-29—State Offices Closed
- Dec 3—Governor Noem's Budget Address
- Dec 4—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—Noon (CT)
- Dec 5—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 17—Watertown—Noon (CT)
- Dec 7—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—VFW—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
- Dec 9—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial at  
Capitol Lake in Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
- Dec—23-25—State Offices Closed



# UPCOMING EVENTS (CONTINUED)

2020

Jan 1—State Offices Closed

Jan 14—State of the State Address

Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception

Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center—  
Oacoma

Mar 25—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)

Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown

May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings

Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron



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South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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